





# Analytic Marxism’s indispensable contribution

## A response to Anthony Monteiro

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**ANTHONY MONTEIRO’S ARTICLE** “Logic, methodology, rational choice Marxism, and the fate of bourgeois Marxism” provides bracing criticism of analytic Marxism.<sup>1</sup> It is an interesting and important piece that merits serious attention. The heyday of analytic Marxism was in the 1980s, just as I came of age. Even then, the sense that Marxism was in crisis, not only politically but intellectually as well, was pervasive. Although Soviet Communism was not to collapse until the end of the decade, the question of whether Marxism as a doctrine as well as a politics had been invalidated by history was widely posed, even if those who raised the question were sometimes denounced as backsliders.

In Britain, the esteemed historian Hobsbawm had, in his article “The Forward March of Labour Halted?” (1978),<sup>2</sup> challenged Marxist complacency about the industrial working class fulfilling the role that the Marxist philosophy of history ascribed to it. The defeat of the miners’ strike in Britain and the breaking of PATCO<sup>3</sup> in the U.S. presaged a period of profound reversal and damaging defeat for the organized working class; this was ostensibly at odds with orthodox Marxist expectations. Imminent deindustrialization raised doubts about whether the industrial working class would remain sufficiently numerous or economically central to be capable of revolutionary impact. On the European continent, the neo-Marxist André Gorz wrote a book whose title actually said goodbye to the industrial working class!<sup>4</sup>

The defeat of American imperialism in Indochina culminated not in the revolutionary idyll some New Leftists had anticipated, but a harsh regime in Vietnam that drove many of the ethnic Chinese minority to risk their lives by fleeing from Vietnam in ramshackle boats (the so-called “Boat People”) and an auto-genocidal catastrophe conducted by the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. The latter led to Vietnamese forces overthrowing the Pol Pot regime and a subsequent military conflict between “liberated-from-imperialism” Vietnam and the “anti-imperialist” People’s Republic of China. This was war between two ostensibly anti-imperialist forces, when the responsibility for war was supposed, according to much Marxist doxa, to lie squarely with imperialism and its minions.

The loss of the emancipatory élan of the Soviet Union and the alleged loss of the Western industrial proletariat’s revolutionary potential shattered the intellectual shibboleths of much of the Old Left, while the messy denouement of struggles in Indochina and the failure of other third-world inspirations for *gauchistes* around the world (such as the guerilla strategies of Che Guevara and his followers<sup>5</sup>) shattered many a New Leftist assumption and platitude. Admittedly, the Marxist Left could, for a few years, still seek revolutionary inspiration in Central America (particularly in Nicaragua and El Salvador), the Caribbean (Grenada and Cuba), and Africa (Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.) However, the ascendancy of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the U.S. was thought, even at the time, to illustrate that the decade was to be one of overwhelming reversal, if not outright defeat, for the Left. The world seemed to be developing in a manner divergent from that which orthodox-received Marxism, at least, had led us to expect. Lenin had said that Marxist theory, conducted through dialectical materialist categories, was all-powerful because it was true. Marxism no longer seemed all-powerful.

The apparent disconfirmation of Marxist analyses prompted a diverse array of Marxists to challenge orthodox and received categorization and methodology. Political movements, it could be argued, generally eschew self-reflection, fearing that, at best, it distracts militants from ongoing struggles, or, at worst, generates a potentially fatal demoralization. Nevertheless, the reversals of the 1980s forced some on the Left to reconsider the basic methodological assumptions of received Marxism. Analytic Marxism was just one form that this questioning of basic Marxist tenets took. (For the lovers of theoretical extravagance, the Althusserian school provided another option. Marxist Hegelianism also opened space for Marxist auto-critique.) Monteiro persuasively demonstrates why analytic Marxist sensibilities grated against many on the Left. These problematic aspects notwithstanding, analytic Marxism’s putative contribution to the reconstitution of Marxism is nevertheless, I mean to argue, indispensable for that project. If one wants to reconstitute Marxism (though if the Left were indeed dead, as Platypus argues, we may not be able to assume that a reconstitution of Marxism is even possible), analytic Marxism’s potential contribution to that project must be acknowledged and engaged. While it would be unwise to mechanically accept all of analytic Marxism’s tenets and findings (especially since they vary between thinkers and over time), a constructive engagement with it is warranted.

Aside from seeing Gerald Cohen’s *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* (1978)<sup>6</sup> in local college bookstores and on the shelves of student radical activists (Monteiro acknowledges that Cohen’s work should not be lumped in with that of other analytic Marxists), my first encounter with analytic Marxism was when I traipsed along, as an undergraduate student, to an American Philosophical Association meeting with two friends, a graduate student and his then girlfriend, who was about to go on the job market as an academic philosopher. I went to one session, which addressed the new trend known as analytic Marxism. One presenter argued that for

at least one of these theorists — I think it was Jon Elster — it was the need to make sense of military conflict between ostensibly socialist nations, China and Vietnam, that prompted confronting ostensible methodological shibboleths of Marxism with the alleged logical rigor of analytic philosophy, rational choice theory, and the like.

Orthodox Marxism regarded itself as the product of a fusion of British political economy, German philosophy, and French socialism, while Gramsci saw Marxism as the application of Hegel to Ricardo. Philosophical concepts are deeply implicated in Marxism’s etiology; so, it is perhaps understandable that, as Perry Anderson wrote in a small book on the subject,<sup>7</sup> Western Marxism responded to political failure in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by retreating into philosophy, placing Marxism in the context of German Idealism. Of course, different strands of Marxist theory valued the Hegelian aspects of their intellectual heritage differently (the Frankfurt School lionized it, while their Althusserian counterparts excoriated it). The Hegelian dialectic and its Marxist derivatives were anathema to much analytical philosophy, since dialectics ostensibly violate the assumption that logical contradictions cannot be incarnated in the real world. For their part, whatever their views on the dialectic and the Hegelian legacy, both philosophically and practically-oriented Marxists seemed to dismiss analytic philosophy as “bourgeois.” *Platypus Review* readers should remember that at the time, no one had yet heard of the Platypus pedagogy; we tended to see “bourgeois” as a purely negative epithet. Frankfurt School theorists saw analytic philosophy as the legitimator of the administrative state, while Althusserians, regarding philosophy as class struggle in the realm of theory, viewed analytical philosophy as one representative of the bourgeoisie in philosophy. For many Marxists, analytic Marxism was one of several ideological assaults on Marxism that had disguised themselves as good-faith attempts to salvage it.

What is it about analytic philosophy that makes it anathema to so many Marxists? Analytic philosophers often follow the lead of natural and empirical social sciences, including economics, in evaluating philosophical claims. According to many analytic philosophers, this allows for a conceptual clarity that eschews the obscurity and obfuscation that, they feel, mar speculative thought, including that emanating from Hegelian and post-Hegelian quarters. (It should be noted that one recent development within academic philosophy is to integrate analytic methods with Hegelian claims. I am personally unfamiliar with this work and therefore totally unqualified to evaluate its merits or failings.) The speculative move that has frequently estranged analytic philosophers from Hegelian theory and its ilk is the latter’s invocation of speculative dialectics. Dialectical thinking, its advocates state, enables one to acknowledge the genuine contradictions within material reality to which the analytic philosopher, refusing to accept the physical (or even social) instantiation of logical contradiction, must, according to many dialectical materialists, remain oblivious. Inevitably therefore, Marxists may come to see analytic philosophy as an obstacle to be overcome, rather than a resource that could enable intellectual edification.

Historically, analytic philosophers have paid attention to the notion of “facts.” They have debated whether facts themselves, along with physical objects, constitute part of the furniture of the world. Dialectical thinkers, such as Lukács and Adorno, see this preoccupation as reflective of a reification of facts. It is an error, Lukács and Adorno would claim, to see facts as literally existing and self-subsistent objects. For Lukács and many other dialectical materialists, there are not really self-subsistent objects at all; there is nothing to the world outside the dynamic processes that constitute the totality.<sup>8</sup> Analytic philosophy’s alleged reification of facts allegedly posits ahistorical static objects and thereby condemns its doctrines to being obfuscatory.<sup>9</sup> For Adorno, the reification of facts parallels the fetishism of commodities that Marx saw as integral to capitalism.<sup>10</sup> Analytic philosophers, committed to emulating the rigor of the natural sciences, Adorno would argue, find it difficult to recognize that subjectivity is a genuine aspect of the objective world (cf. the way analytic philosophers wrestle with the notion of free will!<sup>11</sup>). Admittedly, Marxist theory cannot help but be in tension with analytic philosophy. I would hold, however, that it behooves Marxists to recognize — its tension with dialectical thought notwithstanding — that the methods of analytic philosophy are valid within certain parameters, and that to ignore this validity would be intellectually and politically deleterious for Marxism.

Let us examine further the areas of contention between analytic Marxism and dialectically informed forms of Marxism. Like all analytic philosophers, analytic Marxists find it important that discourse be clear and explicit. If a statement is meaningful, one should, it is felt, be able to explicate it in unambiguous terms. The logical validity of an argument can be determined by analyzing what assumptions are made and the rules of inference invoked. It is assumed that if one applies correct rules of inference to true assumptions, one’s conclusions will always be justified. False assumptions and/or fallacious reasoning undercut justification for reaching any conclusions; fallaciousness is *not* necessarily grounds for

reaching opposite conclusions. The time indicated on a stopped watch does not justify the claim that it is actually that time, but we cannot conclude that it is necessarily not that time; after all, while there are only two times in the whole day that a stopped clock is accurate, we may by chance be at one of those two times. Contradictions within material reality aside, logical consistency and valid inference often remain a good heuristic for evaluating the force of different arguments. Marxists need to explain the current political conjuncture, if they are to intervene in it effectively. It is a human failing to repetitively invoke resonant language to cover up flaws in one’s argument. In the 1980s, and arguably still, some Marxists attempted to defuse theoretical crisis by the repetition of hallowed terminology, such as “dialectical,” “praxis,” and “dictatorship of the proletariat,” relying on the aura of their terminology, rather than their conceptual content to drive home their case. (To be clear, Monteiro does *not* do this. All the times that I have heard him speak at Platypus events or read what he has written, his arguments have been clear and rational, as well as interesting and important.)

It would be arrogant and false for analytic Marxists to claim that *only* they understand the need for conceptual rigor. What they could reasonably claim, though, is that they provide a valuable service by examining the logical validity of arguments, and that their methodology provides a valuable heuristic for the conceptual reconstitution of Marxism. That a thesis cannot be established logically, is not proof that it is false, but it makes its automatic avowal inherently dogmatic and uncritical, unless a rigorous alternative justification is provided. Mere repetition of hallowed phrases is clearly no such thing. The natural sciences generate models representing natural processes. The accuracy of a model depends on the assumptions it invokes and the way elements thereof can interact. To provide an explanation of social reality, analytic Marxists want to be able to model it in a way similar to how natural scientists model the physical world. Several analytic Marxists — Jon Elster and John Roehmer come to mind — rely on a methodological individualism, at times invoking game and rational choice theory, beloved of mainstream economics, to build their models. This can offend Marxists, especially like Lukács and Adorno, who feel that it is precisely administrative and/or capitalist society that forces people to evaluate and pursue their interests the way game theoretical models would suggest.<sup>12</sup> It may be an indictment of capitalism and its administrative state that under contemporary conditions people are motivated in this way, but it does not undercut the possibility that a game-theoretical approach is often useful for describing actual behavior. I would further argue that, if one cannot generate a plausible methodologically individualist model to explain social behavior, you must show specifically why such a model does not apply to the relevant instance. It is unclear that methodological individualism should necessarily be inapplicable to even revolutionary situations. Revolutionary situations may cause individuals to be motivated differently, but there should still be some explanation of their behavior that works at the individual level. Game theory’s model of individual motivations may have to be adapted to capture extraordinary moments in history, but presumably one should, in principle at least, be able to develop models of individual behavior that facilitates understanding of even exceptional situations.

Monteiro critiques the resort of some analytic Marxists to modal logic. (Modal logic is a formal logic that incorporates necessity and possibility. Some fascinating analytic philosophy has focused on its epistemological and metaphysical implications.<sup>13</sup>) Suspicious of formalized thought in general, seeing it as rigid and undialectical, Marxists understandably may be averse to modal logic in particular. Again, that would be a mistake. Marxists argue that proletarian emancipation is historically necessary, not just ethically desirable. On the other hand, Adorno and others have argued that the opportunity for proletarian revolution was missed post-1917 with the containment and degeneration of the Bolsheviks’ project.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that proletarian emancipation may not occur as envisioned. If the revolution could possibly not happen, could it still be historically necessary? Could something never occur despite being historically necessary? What relationship is there between historical necessity and occurrence within history? Can we infer the latter, even if delayed, from the former? This raises the question of whether historical necessity implies historical — if only in the future — actuality. Although this may be pitched at a more abstract level than Marxists would like, it is nevertheless a question that the conjuncture of Marxist traditions and historical experience behoove them to confront. The proletariat is regarded as potentially revolutionary by most Marxists in a way that the petty bourgeoisie and other disaffected social layers are not. But what does “potentially revolutionary” actually mean? Is it just an empirical claim about the future or is there something immanent to different social layers being discerned? How are logical and historical potentialities and possibilities differentiated? These are not purely academic questions for Marxists who base their interventions on the basis of social potentiality; arguably, a theoretical reconstitution of Marxism as a political as well as intellectual force requires resolving them. The clarification of notions such as possibility, potentiality, and necessity are inextricably intertwined with modal logic. Since Marxists cannot ignore these puzzles, they should not eschew modal logic either.

Marxists, from Theodor Adorno and Georg Lukács to Chris Cutrone, have critiqued analytic philosophers for projecting an ahistorical understanding of truth. If cognition is a social process, and if truths are produced by cognition, the truths that are cognized would surely change as the social processes generating truths themselves change. To put it in terms amenable to the analytic philosopher, the categories by means of which we formulate historical

facts, are themselves historical and in flux, so the facts themselves must be historically fluid too. Facts seem to be historical, so truth, according to many an analytic philosopher rigidly associated with facts, must be understood historically too. This historicization of truth rubs many analytic philosophers the wrong way. Bertrand Russell, for example, came to regard a fact as anything that existed independently of our thinking about it.<sup>15</sup> Whether the proverbial cat is indeed on the mat is surely independent of whether anyone perceives it. Whether William the Conqueror’s cat, presuming there was one, did make itself comfortable on a mat during the Battle of Hastings in 1066, should not be affected by the historical insight that that battle enabled the emergence of feudalism in England. On the other hand, whether we agree with official Egyptian state objections to the depiction on Netflix of Cleopatra as a black woman should surely be affected by the way the concept of “blackness” emerged historically. To parse this out will, I suspect, take both historical analysis, to which Marxists are indispensable, *and* the fastidious logic-chopping in which analytic philosophers excel. Analytical Marxism as a bridge between traditions may have a special role to play in resolving these paradoxes.

Surprising previous generations, many Millennial Leftists have rediscovered an ostensibly orthodox Marxism. For example, it is noticeable how much avowedly Marxist rhetoric informed the internal debates of the — at least until recently — ballooning Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Surprisingly large numbers of Millennial and Gen Z Leftists, both inside and outside DSA, refuse to distance themselves from mainstream association with 20<sup>th</sup>-century Stalinism by describing themselves as “communists,” fully owning the historical connotations. Reportedly, the until-recently moribund Communist Party USA (CPUSA) has experienced an influx of young recruits. (It will be interesting to see how this works out; in recent years the CPUSA’s politics have hearkened back to the Popular Front period, while younger “communists” seem to identify with a decidedly ultra-Left politics. Incomprehensibly, to me at least, Maoism seems to have renewed appeal to some younger Marxists.) For better or worse, accurately or inaccurately, today’s young Marxists, outside the Platypus Affiliated Society at least, do not see the current decade as putting Marxist tenets and methodology into doubt the way their predecessors, at least those influenced by the experience of the 1980s Left, do. There is therefore very little appetite for the kind of methodological and theoretical introspection modeled by analytic Marxism. Is this a mistake?

Marx famously wrote that man makes history, but not in the circumstances of his own choosing. Emancipatory aspirations must therefore be grounded on the historical reality in which one is immersed. Marxists seek to provide a critique of current conditions. In the 1980s, some began to wonder whether Marxist categories were still adequate for the comprehension of then-prevailing conditions. Today’s young Marxists arguably feel secure that their own Marxist categories are up to the task. I want to challenge their self-assurance. If one of the flaws of my generation was to undercut the centrality of questions of (working-) class politics to the emancipatory project, it is surely to the younger generation’s credit that class politics are now re-emphasized. This laudable orientation is undercut by ambiguity in what one talks about, when one refers to the working class and class in general. Mainstream sociological thinking has tended to emphasize educational attainment as an important factor in determining class identity. This seems un-Marxist and enables the counterintuitive claim, for example, that the disproportionate appeal of Trumpism to many white voters without a college degree suggests that MAGA politics are, in part at least, working-class politics. We do need to grapple with the way that educational level has become so operative in contemporary American politics. A Marxist analysis should analyze the complications of correlating Marxist understandings of class with educational level. This requires, I would claim, a clearer definition of what defines the working class in particular, and social class in general, according to Marxism. Many analytic philosophers are all about definitions. Analytic Marxists could be of help here.

A mainstream notion that has had more traction for Marxists in the past is that factory workers epitomize the working class. One orthodox Marxist argument is that one epitomizes being working class if one works in industry, does not own any of the means of production, works for a wage, and produces surplus value to be appropriated by the bourgeoisie. Some Marxists have dropped the requirement of working in industry and focused on the exploitation relationship alone to update class categories in an apparently more post-industrial era. However, there is arguably no clear relationship between producing surplus value and being impoverished. For example, highly paid computer engineers produce surplus value for their employers but are not regarded as working class, while sanitation workers produce little if any surplus value, but surely are workers nevertheless. At Platypus events, Monteiro has identified the need to reconstitute an American Marxism through, in part, an examination of the way that African Americans have historically played the historical role of a proletariat in the U.S. This would also involve recasting orthodox Marxist conceptualization of class. Since Occupy, sections of the Left seem to focus on wealth distribution rather than exploitation as the decisive factor in determining class position (counterposing the richest 1% to the remaining 99%). Whatever its merits, such a view contradicts the traditional Marxist emphasis on exploitation rather than unjust distribution. Platypus itself engages in the project of defining class by de-emphasizing demographic considerations and advocates thinking of the proletariat and other classes in historical terms. This is intriguing but requires, I feel, a further clarification of what, if we are to avoid philosophical idealism, distinguishes historical and demographic



categories. The 1980s saw the beginning of deindustrialization in advanced capitalist economies, prompting analytic Marxists and others to clarify conceptions of the working class and class generally.<sup>16</sup> This project remains unfinished, but, analytic-Marxist-style fastidiousness about concepts and modes of inference can make an important contribution to its completion.

The recent emergence of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as an economic superpower will, one way or another, have profound implications for global capitalism and human history generally. A snapshot view of China’s economy would suggest that the PRC is nothing more than an emergent capitalist, and therefore possibly imperialist, actor. However, the PRC is self-avowedly communist and has roots in one of the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century communist revolutions. Considering this historical context, some Marxists have argued that China’s apparently capitalist development is being managed by the Chinese Communist Party so as to facilitate the eventual development of socialism; the regime is actually proto-socialist.<sup>17</sup> The political stakes of this argument are clear, at least for Marxists. To evaluate these claims, one would have to establish the credibility of a model of transition to socialism along these putative lines, as well as a clearer understanding of what would actually constitute socialism. Can one provide a plausible account of how communist management of an ostensibly capitalist economy in China would be such as to provide a more or less smooth transition to socialism? Doing that would seem to require plausible models of how that might actually happen. Rational choice theory should not be ignored in these discussions; analytic Marxism’s methodologies may be instructive.

I remember the days when it was argued that the Marxist (Lenin’s) concept of “Imperialism” was outdated. (I remember a British SWP (UK)<sup>18</sup> member — he left the party soon thereafter for unrelated reasons — informing me in the 1980s that anyone who invoked it uncritically should “have their knuckles rapped”!) However, today the term is aggressively invoked to buttress opposing political positions. Take the case of the war in Ukraine. There is a current on the Left that, while recognizing that inter-imperialist competition is a very present factor, avers that the Ukrainians themselves are engaged in a genuine national liberation struggle. While some who hold this view may still be wary of endorsing NATO and Western assistance to Ukraine, Leftist support for the national liberation struggle is still thought to be essential. Other Marxists argue that given the hegemony of the U.S. within the global imperialist system and the U.S.’s allegiances in the matter, the Ukrainian struggle actually fosters imperialism rather than national liberation. If anything, these Leftists incline to support Russia. There are also Marxists who deemphasize anti-imperialism and national liberation, seeing both sides as capitalist and therefore unworthy of Marxist sympathy.<sup>19</sup> No intellectual resolution of these debates is possible unless participants can develop a common understanding of what one precisely means by such terms as “imperialism” and “national liberation.” It is not clear that contemporary Marxist understandings around imperialism correspond to Lenin’s notion of the fusion of financial and industrial capital and the subordination of the national state to its blocs of capital. Nor is it clear that a single coherent alternative understanding of imperialism is being deployed. The Marxist intellectual trying to make up her mind about Ukraine must clarify terms such as imperialism and national liberation. An examination of their meaning and inferential implications will be essential. Adopting the sensibilities of Analytic Marxism would again be helpful.

I suspect that Monteiro (and many members of the Platypus Affiliated Society) will feel that I have missed the point. They are not against conceptual clarity. (After all, why would they be?) Their opposition to analytic Marxism is political, not epistemological; it is based on a recognition of the link between methodologies inherent in analytic Marxism and the liberal technocratic politics that define progressivism in an administered society. My critics might, always in a kind way to be sure, point out that since my own politics are arguably close to those that analytic Marxism is accused of, my views only validate their negative diagnosis. It is certainly true that analytic Marxists seem to be drawn toward inevitably technocratic models of market socialism. (John Roehmer is a prime case in point.<sup>20</sup>) I acknowledge that there may be a link between the acceptance of the principles of analytic philosophy and acceptance of the need, in technologically advanced and complex societies at least, for an administrative state of some kind. (I would want to work for one that is as democratic, respectful of civil liberties, and economically egalitarian as possible.) Formal logic allows one to see the implications of certain things being logically mutually exclusive of each other. Social regulation is required when unregulated social behavior would vitiate the possibility of meeting vital human needs. One example: regardless of the predominant mode of production, activities increasing carbon emissions need to be regulated if the planet is to be saved. The reality that certain outcomes are mutually exclusive both validates the application of formal logic of analytic philosophy in some cases, and also suggests the need for some kind of administrative state in modern and technologically complex societies. (Simpler and technologically primitive communities can regulate themselves through tradition and custom, but dynamic and differentiated technologically advanced societies require a state to regulate production. The reality that some things are indeed mutually exclusive of each other legitimates both the application of formal logic where appropriate, and the existence of the least authoritarian administrative state possible.)

My defense of analytic philosophy and analytic Marxism is not meant to undercut dialectical thinking as such, even if much analytic Marxism seems so disposed. While formal logic and mathematical methodology are indispensable, there are aspects

of the world with which they seem to have trouble. While reality often takes an objective form for which analytic philosophy and mathematical representation are well fitted, there seem to be multiple instances of subjectivity that are irreducible to the objective, and therefore essentially problematic for analytical philosophy. Politics, psychoanalysis, and art have irreducibly subjective elements that make them difficult for methodologies lionized by the analytic philosopher to handle adequately. In discussing politics, art, psychoanalysis and the like, dialectical thought that recognizes the contradictory co-presence of the subjective and the objective is productive. We should recognize, I claim, that while dialectical thinkers and analytic philosophers are right to see their respective methodologies as being in serious tension, neither should dismiss or reject the other’s *in toto*. Maybe, as both Lukács and Adorno intimate, this tension between objectivity and subjectivity would dissipate in an emancipated society, but I tend to doubt it. **IP**

<sup>1</sup> In this issue. An earlier version of Monteiro’s article appeared as “A Dialectical-Materialist Critique of Analytical Marxism,” *Nature, Society, and Thought* 3, no. 2 (1990): 197–223, available online at <<http://the-trusteeship.com/docs/nst032.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “The Forward March of Labour Halted?,” *Marxism Today* (September 1978): 279–86, available online at <<https://banmarchive.org.uk/marxism-today/september-1978/the-forward-march-of-labour-halted/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization.

<sup>4</sup> André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> See Joseph Hansen, *The Leninist Strategy of Party Building: The Debate on Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” (1923), in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 199–200.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 182–83.

<sup>10</sup> See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. ed. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> John Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Lukács, “Reification,” 197.

<sup>13</sup> See Timothy Williamson, *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1948), 159–60.

<sup>16</sup> See Erik Olin Wright, et al., *The Debate On Classes* (London: Verso, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> See Ben Burgis and Conrad B. Hamilton, “DEBATE: Should The Left Embrace China?” (2020), *The Serf Times*, available online at <<https://youtu.be/DFkEXvYBwTg>>.

<sup>18</sup> Socialist Workers Party (United Kingdom).

<sup>19</sup> See Chris Cutrone, “Ukraine: More of the same,” *Platypus Review* 145 (April 2022), available online at <<https://platypus1917.org/2022/04/01/ukraine-more-of-the-same/>>.

<sup>20</sup> See John E. Roehmer, *A Future for Socialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

“Worse than the 80s,” cont. from page 2

**DH:** Why didn’t you attempt to form a new political party out of your activism?

**GJ:** That’s a regret — not having tried that.

**DH:** Did this seem too ambitious, too difficult?

**GJ:** There would have been too few people from the group to call themselves a party, though I’m sure the membership numbers for many parties in the U.S. today are comparable, e.g., the SWP probably has a couple of septuagenarians and one college student in their so-called branches. We could have done better than that. But no, we couldn’t have built an alternative. The SWP seems to have a Jonestown air about them, built around one guru who leads the group in a messianic way. This is a risk with a small group of people declaring themselves a political party.

**DH:** Sectarianism, in a word.

Turning to the present, solidarity and anti-imperialism have re-emerged on the Left as a potent issue given the Ukraine-Russia conflict, but also other things like China. Are there any lessons from your experience in the 80s for Leftists or socialists today?

**GJ:** You can see a whole range of Left and populist people in the U.S., including some in the Republican Party, who have a Putin-sympathetic, anti-imperialist understanding that says, “Russia is justified in what it’s doing in Ukraine, and Ukraine is a fascist state that should be swept away.” What do they know about (1), Putin and the Russian Federation — Putin is one of the most rabid anti-communist we’ve seen, certainly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century — and (2), the reality of Ukraine, where fascists got about 2% in the last election? Instead, these people focus on how the Ukrainian army is pointing guns at their own people to force them to shoot, to fight the Russians. Hello? Every military that ever existed since the invention of handguns enlisted soldiers carrying rifles and the officers carrying pistols, because the pistols are for shooting the enlisted men if they don’t shoot the enemy or they try to desert! I’m sorry, but saying that the Ukrainian army is pointing guns at their own people to force them to fight the Russians is

not a cogent political argument. It’s the same with saying that Ukrainians have tied people up naked in the town square and tortured them. I’m sorry, that’s what you do to collaborators because you don’t want anyone else to collaborate. Did we all condemn the ANC<sup>11</sup> when they necklaced collaborators with the Apartheid machine? As if the Russians wouldn’t do that kind of shit? They’re doing that as the invading force! Please spare me the idiotic, elementary-school, anti-imperialist politics.

However, coming out in support of Western military armaments to Ukraine is a tough sell. The optics are bad no matter how you look at it. On the other hand, do we just say to Ukraine, “roll over and die”? It’s incredible the way that the nation responded, and it wasn’t because there were fascists in the militia that they successfully resisted and, to an extent, pushed back the Russian invasion. This is a popular national resistance. Of course it’s a bourgeois state. Here’s another one, “but they’ve outlawed strikes and outlawed unions!”

**DH:** And opposition parties.

**GJ:** They’re at war! Abraham Lincoln suspended civil liberties in the U.S. Roosevelt did too in WWII, and we weren’t even being invaded.

**DH:** Against the SWP.

**GJ:** Yeah, exactly, that’s terrible. No, they shouldn’t do that. The workers in Ukraine should organize a popular resistance; they should make the war of resistance against Russia into a revolutionary struggle in their own interests. Are they going to be able to do that? I don’t know, but whether they get Western weapons or not doesn’t decide it. Receiving Western weapons isn’t going to create a false consciousness in which they can trust Western imperialism as opposed to Russian imperialism. Do you really believe the CIA and George Soros engineered the popular Maidan Revolution?<sup>12</sup> No; the CIA didn’t engineer it, but they took advantage of it. It was real; it was millions of people, and they ejected an utterly corrupt — not even pro-Putin, but fence-sitting — Viktor Yanukovych because the majority of Ukrainians wanted to become part of Europe, because Europe is cool and Russia sucks. That’s what the Ukrainians decided. Of course NATO’s got a dirty history: they funded fascists as part of a stay-behind guerrilla campaign against an expected Soviet overrun of Europe.

**DH:** Based on your experience in terms of solidarity, an experience that much of the Left lacks, what should Leftists in the U.S. do for Ukrainian, Russian, and Chinese workers?

**GJ:** The International Socialist Alternative (ISA) is one of, if not the only, Left political formations — maybe the IMT<sup>13</sup> has somebody — with a Russian section, an organization that publishes, holds demonstrations, and has had key organizers arrested — some now in exile. When I hear Leftist pundits in the U.S. talking about the need for solidarity with the Russian working class, I think, “we’re doing it; you’re doing nothing.”

One lesson from the solidarity movement has to be remaining critical of the people you’re in solidarity with. On that matter, Ukraine deserves to have self-determination, and therefore Ukraine should emerge victorious in ejecting the Russian army back to, at least, the February 24 border. But we have to recognize that there are as many dangers in that successful scenario as there are in the scenario where they fail and Russia secures the four provinces that it illegally annexed.

Regarding China, the work we did — I shouldn’t talk about ISA because I don’t represent it in any sense — mostly around Europe and the U.S., in supporting the Sitong Bridge Man<sup>14</sup> and the White Paper Protests,<sup>15</sup> was excellent. It was an overseas reverberation filtering back to China through the Great Firewall.

We worked on campuses, organizing discussions and panels about the issues of the coming revolution in China. We weren’t the only ones; there were many others, spontaneously organized by Chinese students overseas. We jumped on that activity because we saw it was important. Without it, I’m not sure how much coverage it would have gotten within China. But because it went overseas and returned, it’s widely known in China, and even Chinese observers are admitting, that this was a major factor in the sudden decision to abolish the zero-COVID policy, which had turned into an utter shitshow and has probably done more to discredit the CCP<sup>16</sup> than anything since Tiananmen Square (1989). You’ve got to wonder, what will it take for the more politically aware Chinese masses? I mean, they sing “The Internationale” at their protests! At Tiananmen, they wanted real socialism, socialism with democracy. They didn’t want American-style big business to rule politics. I’ve heard big populist podcasters in the U.S. bad-mouthing Tiananmen and saying George Soros was behind it. How ignorant can you be?

**DH:** Could solidarity efforts succeed today where NICA was only successful in the short-term?

**GJ:** Since we were just talking about China and the potential for Chinese revolution, I can say that building a revolutionary movement in tandem with a solidarity movement could happen if there were a successful popular revolution in China. There could be a solidarity movement in the U.S. in support of a democratic revolution in China, though that revolution would be socialist and anti-imperialist in its orientation. Even if the U.S. decided that it didn’t like the new regime, a solidarity movement could arise.

The situation today is worse than it was in the 80s in terms of solidarity. For example, you’ve got ultra-nationalist, Right-wing, Republican anti-imperialists, who are opposed aiding Ukraine, all the way through to different Trotskyist, Maoist sects, the Squad, and the DSA, who support aid to Ukraine. That’s a mess. “Solidarity for Ukraine!” “No, they’re fascists!” It’s worse than the 80s.

**DH:** Your imagination for solidarity in the 80s was still considering revolution in the U.S., which is missing from today’s solidarity. What solidarity means today is, “there’s some people over there

who are doing something good, and we have to help them.” Would you agree with that?

**GJ:** The dominant trend — and it’s sad because a lot of good people think this way — is to understand revolution at home as self-help and collectives. I would contribute. I would even spend a few hours at a co-op. But that’s not making a revolution; that’s welfare. It’s not the kind of welfare that’s evil — dependent creating — but it’s social welfare. Revolution is organizing.

So much of the Left now has got ridiculous, woke ideological blinders. If I said, “I don’t think we should go around punching people wearing MAGA hats, because if we don’t recruit a sizable number of MAGA-hat wearing, Trump Republicans to the revolution, we’re not going to have a revolution,” it would be alien to many on the Left today. One of the things Jimmy Dore says that he’s absolutely right about — he was a bricklayer and in different unions — is that trying to begin a union in the workplace by asking, “did you vote for Trump?,” is just insane. Those people should be drummed out, because that’s just destructive. I get the extreme pessimism that’s easy to fall into. I was in a union for ten years. I was in the janitor’s union at Princeton the year after I graduated, then I was at Amalgamated Transit. It’s hard, and I don’t know how it’s going to work, but you have to participate.

It’s not easy, but you have to be part of an organization; you can’t be a lone-wolf revolutionary. You have to think and speak out when you can. You have to be able to seize the moment, because there is such a thing as a revolutionary window; there are situations where the opportunity arises and then it’s gone: you’ve either taken it or you haven’t. There is no substitute to handling situations on the ground and speaking extemporaneously on the street or in a meeting for developing those instincts.

Derrick Varn is wrong to say that our task is now analysis because the Left is in such shambles. But it would be equally wrong to say that all we have to do is put in a little effort and things will turn around. Things will inevitably turn around. Opportunities will arise, but the way the U.S. looks now, all bets are off on who’s going to be more successful in exploiting them. It’s just as easily going to be the Right in the U.S. taking up the revolutionary potential, because some of those today who consider themselves revolutionary are going to go with the fascists. Historically that’s always happened. **IP**

<sup>1</sup> “Prouder, Stronger, Better,” commonly known as “Morning in America,” was a 1984 television commercial that was part of the presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan.

<sup>2</sup> *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of Nicaragua’s Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) (Sandinista National Liberation Front).

<sup>4</sup> Barry Sheppard, *The Party: The Socialist Workers Party 1960–1988, Volume 2: Interregnum, Decline and Collapse, 1973–1988* (London: Resistance Books, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Derived from the Spanish word *contrarrevolución* (counterrevolution), this refers to those opposed to the Sandinistas.

<sup>6</sup> Party for Socialism and Liberation.

<sup>7</sup> Communist Party USA.

<sup>8</sup> An American aircraft manufactured by McDonnell Douglas.

<sup>9</sup> Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

<sup>10</sup> Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.

<sup>11</sup> African National Congress, a political party in South Africa.

<sup>12</sup> Also known as the Revolution of Dignity or the Ukrainian Revolution; it took place in Ukraine in February 2014 at the end of the Euromaidan protests.

<sup>13</sup> International Marxist Tendency.

<sup>14</sup> On October 13, 2022, in the prelude to the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, a man — later dubbed Bridge Man (after Tank Man) — protested Xi Jinping by hanging banners and burning tires on the Sitong Bridge in Beijing.

<sup>15</sup> A series of protests against COVID-19 lockdowns in China in November 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Chinese Communist Party.



**GJ:** Yes. Except how many Americans went to Vietnam, besides Jane Fonda? Not many. How many Americans spoke Vietnamese or could read Vietnamese? Even fewer. Jane Fonda certainly didn't speak Vietnamese. But Spanish? There were millions of people. DC had a huge Latino population. They came from all over, not just Florida Cubans, but California Chicano, Mexican-Americans, New Jersey Puerto Ricans.

We were told how important it would be to support the Nicaragua Network, the national office of the Nicaragua solidarity movement in DC. We agreed we could dedicate some of our time to that. We wanted to build an anti-intervention coalition. We wanted to send more brigadistas every year, partly because just the physical presence of Americans in the countryside of Nicaragua hindered the Contra<sup>5</sup> assault — that was the whole *raison d'être*. We also hoped that they could come back and help us and build our organization. The brigades weren't much of an organization builder, but that wasn't the primary purpose.

We wanted to raise material aid; we did it by things like selling Nicaraguan coffee, hence we had a "coffee-in" in Dupont Circle, where we sold coffee and coffee beans saying, "support Nicaragua, support the Sandinista Revolution, buy coffee." We said we would volunteer with the Nicaragua Network to provide needed manpower, since they only had a handful of people at that point. The problem was that they were shambolic; they were just ridiculous. It would take them days to organize a mail-in to send to several thousand people. I wasn't a consultant then, but a consultant would have had a heyday. We went in, asked what the job was, pulled together, and knocked it out in three hours and ordered pizza along the way. Then we got asked to write the political update for the next mail-in.

**DH:** For the Nicaragua Network?

**GJ:** Yes, and they said, "you can't say that Congress has been complicit; we don't want to discourage people from lobbying." Our response was, first, "do you want to educate people or do you just want them to do what you want them to do?" Second, "why aren't we asking people what they need? This is a national organization; we should be providing resources, case studies, templates." Their answer was, "No, no, no. We have a project; it's the Nicaragua solidarity campaign, it's important, but we're waiting to get details from Managua on what they need us to ask for."

**DH:** Before we get into that, I want to raise a broader question: how did you distinguish your socialist, or at least Leftist, organization from other solidarity organizations?

**GJ:** A major group was the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, which was national. They were big, well-organized, and they had a local presence. But they were mouthpieces for the FSLN. That's how they conceived themselves. The Nicaragua Network was supposed to be broader to the extent that the Sandinista Revolution was being sold as a national-bourgeois project, a cooperation with the national bourgeoisie and encompassing the religious groups and Chamorro, the big domestic capitalists other than Anastasio Somoza Debayle and his cronies. That was the line.

So you kind of thought that the Nicaragua Network would be a little broader in its approach rather than just saying they were the mouthpiece of the FSLN. And they didn't ever say they were the mouthpiece of the FSLN; they said they were leading the Nicaragua solidarity movement, but they actually did jack. They waited 18 months for those details from Managua on what they should put on their "Let Nicaragua Live!" campaign. Are you kidding me? This is 1984 going into 85, the Contra war is full-scale, people are being murdered, their bodies mutilated, whole agricultural collectives are being burned to the ground, and they're waiting for details from Managua on what we should be collecting for them for material aid. It's just too much.

There was the labor solidarity group which I was also a part of, but that was labor-focused; it brought trade unionists. Then there were the political parties involved in the solidarity movement: the SWP, the Workers World Party (WWP) — now basically PSL<sup>6</sup> — and Line of March. They were going to show up and toe the FSLN line, which was basically do whatever the Nicaragua Network says. But, they weren't telling us to do anything, they told us to wait. The message was, "the Network is back!" when it wasn't back at all. It had become so dormant and inactive that half a year before we went to Nicaragua one of the two staffers had tried to pack the entire office into a U-Haul and drive it to Seattle because they were from Seattle. They thought if they were going to be doing this work, collecting a paycheck, they might as well be in their hometown because they hated DC. Seriously?

On how we distinguished ourselves, instead of just getting a name of a group to sign as a sponsor for our next big protest, we would turn out and support them. If the boycotters of South Africa were boycotting gas stations, we would send a few people to help them. The Filipinos who were then overthrowing Ferdinand Marcos — we would turn out for whatever they called for. I was a contributing editor to the Young Koreans United newsletter.

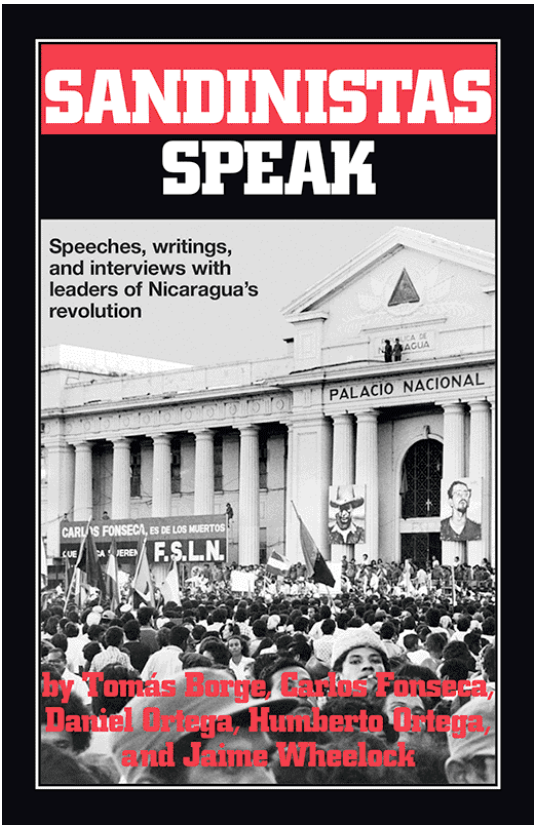
Our educational / propaganda mission also distinguished us. That was at the heart of what we did. It was our first task after we had created an identity: we identified what our process was going to be. We called it, "consensus minus-one": if everybody except one person in the group wanted to do something, we would do it. We did function mostly by consensus, it was just to say that it wasn't absolute. We had things like a rotating chair and secretary. The bookkeeper was the only consistent thread and that was because he was good at it and willing to do it. The rotating role distinguished us from the Stalinist groups. Every Stalinist group I've ever seen has the chairman that chairs all the meetings. You want to encourage passivity? That's the way to do it. You want people to feel engaged and to be confident in contributing to a meeting? Have them be the chair of the meeting, then they can appreciate what it's like.

**DH:** Could you speak more on your educational activities?

**GJ:** Once we defined ourselves we made a brochure. It was a beauty, because we spent a long time wording it, and we got great photos. We mailed it to everybody; we handed it out on the street. We created leaflets constantly, and we would update them for specific events like a fundraiser for the Contras and Manolo Blahnik — the famous shoe guy who happened to be Nicaraguan — was going to be there.

The backs of our pamphlets had a map of Central America and U.S. military dispositions in each country, with a blurb and a little tear-away to sign up for our mail-in list. We got a lot of people to sign up to the list. Maintaining it was a major job because every time you send it out at least 10% came back with the address changed.

**DH:** For these leaflets, what was the substance of the education or information? What were you expecting people to do after they had read your material?



The cover of *Sandinistas Speak* (1982)

**GJ:** You could say that we were a bunch of rejects from some Leftist group or another, who got together and opportunistically thought we could use the Sandinista Revolution to sell a new configuration of revolutionary politics, by comparison with Nicaragua's success, to show what needed to happen in the U.S. It wouldn't be a fair or accurate representation, but I could see less charitable people saying such a thing. Our priority was to support the Nicaraguan Revolution, but for the sake of building a revolution movement in the U.S. That's why the Nicaraguans were so mad with us: "What the hell are you talking about homelessness for? Why are you talking about Palestine? Why are you even talking about El Salvador? Fuck El Salvador! You work for us!" No, we don't. We were for ourselves, and for what we believed was the best course forward for everyone, including the Sandinistas, but not for the Sandinistas above the mission of building a better society internationally.

Some people considered us Trotskyist, but that was unfair. I was the only actual former Trotskyist. We had a few DSAers, a few former Stalinists, and some co-op movement people. We had some religious people, though they gravitated towards the religious groups, whom we respected so much more than many of the political groups. I would prefer to deal with Christ-believers than fake Marxists any day.

**DH:** Are you calling the Sandinistas "fake Marxists"?

**GJ:** No, I'm calling the SWP a degenerated cult, along with the WWP, who said, "Gaddafi is an international working class hero." There were also the Stalinists saying, "we have to work inside the Democratic Party." They wouldn't be caught dead saying that publicly, but of course the thrust of what they wanted to do was replace the CPUSA<sup>7</sup> as the ultra Left-wing of the Democratic Party, the secret sect inside the Democrats. This is the 1980s after all, pre-Clinton.

What we did in education was great. We were constantly going to schools, churches, yoga groups, people's homes for public dinners, whatever we could get an invite to talk about the revolution. We had slides and a loose script, points to cover. We had training for public speaking, so that even if they didn't join us, people could come to a train before talking to their own groups and do our work for themselves. But that was nothing compared to building a coalition where you had 20 actual groups, like the Gray Panthers of Montgomery County — groups with people who would distribute the flyer that we created for the coalition. Our flyer would be multi-issue, because for a while people would hand out something that's only talking about Nicaragua, but they got their own organizations and their own agendas, and you have to respect that. We went out of our way to not only respect their agenda but also support it. It was exhausting, frankly, but we did it.

**DH:** Were these the other solidarity groups?

**GJ:** Yeah, the Filipinos, South Koreans, Palestinians — nothing compares to having them as a multiplier. We distributed 200,000 flyers in a lead up to one demonstration and 300,000 for another. Our posters and spray painting were all over town. It was valuable not just because it was a city in America but because it was DC, and the motherfuckers in Congress, who are voting on this, can't help but see — since Roman times and before — the writing on the wall. Of course they did all kinds of maneuvering with humanitarian aid to the Contras, etc., but those were compromises that we forced them into. They wanted the overthrow of the Sandinistas! They didn't want those people inoculating their entire population, reducing infant mortality from 40% down to 3%. No, absolutely not! That was my point about the education: it was all the tried and true methods, from doing tables at high-traffic areas, selling buttons, T-shirts, sweatshirts, bumper stickers, all

kinds of paraphernalia, coffee cups with slogans on them, and recruiting other groups to our cause. But those things have a moment, and for us the moment was about five years. Those five were pretty good, but it was a moment.

**DH:** You've made it clear that you have a lot of criticisms of the official solidarity movement. Could you elaborate on them more? What were the problems with the official solidarity movement, and why was it like that?

**GJ:** There were two planks to the official Nicaragua solidarity movement. First, the FSLN and their partners in the U.S, who were not just the Nicaragua Network; it was also local groups. They were basically on the board, along with some rich people, of the Nicaragua Network. The first plank that they prescribed was legislative work, to the point that they had lobbyists come in to say, "get everybody on your mailing list to write to their congresspeople, and tell them to support H.R.34972, the 'House Amendment to Provide Humanitarian Aid to the Nicaraguan Resistance in Support of Democracy.'" What the fuck? That's our priority? Telling everybody to call their congressperson?

The second plank was humanitarian aid, because the Sandinistas got so used to getting material aid and money flowing in from overseas, from North America, but a lot of it came from the social democratic governments of Europe. It wasn't billions, but then again Nicaragua was a dirt-poor country with a million people, so it made a difference and it was important. The Sandinistas wanted that flow to keep going, they didn't want it to stop. Five years in, and that's still their number one priority. "Let Nicaragua Live!" The solidarity campaign finally got the details from Managua at the end of 85 and said, "'Let Nicaragua Live!' is your top priority." No, it isn't. Even if it were, there is no way we're going to be raising the kind of money that we did before for a couple of reasons. One, people are a little tired of hearing about Nicaragua. Sorry! I know it's the most important country in the world, and you do everything they tell you to do and would never question an order that came from a saint in the FSLN. Second, the FSLN is doing a lot of shit that is getting bad press, and it's not all CIA propaganda. Sorry!

**DH:** What was the FSLN doing, for example?

**GJ:** The curtailment of civil liberties, freedom of speech. The arbitrary expulsion of any Westerner or non-Nicaraguan who voiced even the slightest question of the wisdom of doing this or that. These were not conspirators planning a counterrevolution, but well-intentioned people who dedicated their lives, but began to say, "this is going to end up hurting the Sandinista Revolution overseas." — "Get the fuck out! Counterrevolutionary! CIA spy!" Dan La Botz's *What Went Wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution* (2016) does a good job of covering this. Some of it was incredibly stupid public-relations stuff. Daniel Ortega, coming from one of the poorest countries in the world to New York, goes out and spends thousands of dollars on the most expensive designer glasses you can buy. You thought nobody would catch onto that? That nobody would notice that? That your lobbyist told you, "this is what you have to do, you have to look your best in front of other world leaders."

Making material, humanitarian aid the top priority in 1985 was a mistake, because you're just going to be putting three times the effort you did before, and you're going to get much less than half of the result. Those were the two priorities as far as the Nicaragua Network, the FSLN were concerned. And our number one priority was to build the Stop the U.S. War in Nicaragua coalition, which meant that we worked with everybody we could. For the person I dealt with — at the embassy, he was in charge of dealing with the solidarity movement — this was all a distraction: "Yes, it's great that you can build a large demonstration, but the focus has to be on Congress in order to stay the hand of Reagan and the U.S. war machine." You wanted to ask, where does your understanding of politics come from? Why do you think political actors do things? One might well have asked, because it turns out — if you look at La Botz's book — that the Sandinistas were crystal clear on their top-down Stalinist political program from day one. Consider the fact that they never held a party convention; they never held a party congress until 1990 when they lost the election. How are you deciding things? How are you coming to a conclusion on the best way forward? Oh, it sprung out of Thomas Borge and Daniel Ortega's thumb.

**DH:** You called the FSLN Stalinists. What do you mean by that, besides their authoritarianism?

**GJ:** That might be giving them too much credit. "Bonapartist," "Peronist," or "caudillist" might be more correct. Stalinists hold political congresses. They may physically eliminate anybody they think is going to speak out at the party congress beforehand, but at least they go through the motions. For the Sandinistas to never even have one in 11 years is mind boggling. They said that they wanted to build a broad front: "it's a national reconstruction; the bourgeoisie are central to our program." They had a five-man leadership body, but three of the five were Sandinistas — two of them were known and the third was a secret Sandinista who never revealed his secret affiliation. Of the other two, one was religious, the other a big capitalist. They were Stalinist in the sense that they truly believed in a two-stage revolution, but a two-stage revolution without sharing political power with anybody. They thought they could swing it; they thought they could manage because they're so smart.

To say it didn't work out is a bit unfair. After all, they were facing the most powerful military power in the world, who was hell-bent on destroying them and did have billions of dollars in military bases, material; they had a mercenary army that they conjured up from former national guard officers and Argentinian torturers, who they supplied with three overflights a day, dropping out of a DC-10.<sup>8</sup> It was a difficult situation, and their choices were limited by

poverty, the destruction that the war to liberate the country had wrought, and the sanctions imposed by the U.S. But, they consciously said, "we're going to be like Cuba; we're going to follow the Cuban model."

There was a saying I learned when I was in Nicaragua. When you want something done right, you do it the way the Cubans do, "*a los cubanos*." Yet Sandanistas didn't. They weren't as capable or as smart as the Cuban Revolutionaries — for all their faults; I'm hardly holding them up. If you asked for the single defining thing about them — besides the internal shitslinging around the split in the SWP that's still such a hallmark of particularly Trotskyist but most Left organizations — it was the orientation towards Cuba. So Cuba is going to be our model in the U.S. for how we build a socialist revolution, in the heart of imperialism? What on earth are you thinking? They weren't thinking; they were just like, "the Cubans have a successful model and we don't have any other models; the Fourth International is out; we're not going to have anything to do with them anymore since we insulted Ernest Mandel to his face."

**DH:** On Stalinism, do you think the Sandinistas capitulated to socialism in one country, the classical Trotskyist criticism of Stalinism?

**GJ:** Oh yeah. In that light, I have to claim credit for a slogan I patented, "Sandinismo in one country," because that's exactly what it was. "Everything for the Sandinista Revolution!" Except, wait a minute, what about the founding principles of Carlos Fonseca — a Stalinist, he founded the FSLN in 1962 — the historic program of redistributing the land to the peasants and self-determination, autonomy, for the Atlantic coast? "Oh," the FSLN says, "we aren't going to do either of those things." But since there wasn't a party congress, there was nobody to raise their hand and say, "what about our historic program?"

It begins to beg the question, for what? A revolution that accomplishes what? Again, totally Trotskyist, but how do you build socialism without democracy? If you don't even have internal democracy within your organization, how are you going to build a democratic process in the country as a whole? You're not. You're going to have mass organizations that you can look at and then give a speech in front of, and, through osmosis, absorb what they want the leadership to do. Bullshit.

**DH:** What happened to the solidarity movement? How and why did it end? What happened to your organization specifically?

**GJ:** The solidarity movement started quieting down with less and less to do. The brigades went on until 88, but once the Network took it back from the Nicaraguan Exchange, who had started the brigades, it was outsourced when we went on the first wave. It just collapsed when they attempted to do it one year. Our organization continued functioning but we asked, "what are we going to do?" We ended up supporting other groups because there wasn't a mass movement anymore. You're not going to build a coalition to stop the U.S. invasion of Nicaragua after it had become a dead letter. In a way, the U.S. won because, by applying that pressure combined with the Sandinistas' failings, the Nicaraguan Revolution didn't ignite. The mass organizations just became utterly bureaucratic. I called them Peronist, but they became more like the PRI<sup>9</sup> in Mexico: a state-instantiated revolutionary party that doesn't do anything revolutionary anymore.

I left in November of 89. By that point we weren't needed. We continued doing things as a group that weren't Nicaragua-specific, because we had that dual approach, which was building connections within the U.S. on domestic issues and internationally with other groups, as well as working in solidarity with Nicaragua. Nicaraguan solidarity quietly crumbled. By 89 there wasn't any reason d'être; it wasn't sustainable. If you want to help the Palestinians, join a Palestinian solidarity group. We weren't going to become a clearing house. We thought of ourselves as a small wheel that's built to drive much larger wheels, and that's what we did in building coalitions.

**DH:** Would you say that NICA or your solidarity activism was successful? You seem disappointed with what happened in Nicaragua.

**GJ:** It was absolutely successful in articulating, expressing, and putting right in their fucking faces the U.S. popular opposition to their war against the Sandinista Revolution. But we never had a chance to become a lasting organization in terms of building a movement atop the accomplishments of the Sandinista Revolution.

**DH:** You mentioned an implicit, broader goal of revitalizing the Left in the U.S.

**GJ:** Especially revitalizing a Left that was, to the extent it existed, siloed into a variety of cults. I'm glad we didn't have to deal with the Sparts or the RCP<sup>10</sup> in DC. There could be an organization that did more, but that wasn't going to happen. Not even everyone in the group wanted that. They wanted to be able to do something that contributed towards building a revolution in the U.S., and it wasn't just going to the shooting range and learning how to handle a rifle.

**DH:** Is there anything you would have changed in terms of your activism? Knowing how the Sandinistas turned out, do you think your solidarity activism should have taken a different character?

**GJ:** No, I don't think so, because, for better or worse, Nicaragua was the issue. Indeed there were many issues: in Central America, Guatemalan genocide, in El Salvador, death squads reigned. But Nicaragua was the call of the moment; it was the largest motivating factor because the U.S. was so involved in trying to destroy the Sandinista Revolution. It sounds reductive, but the fact that the U.S. was trying to destroy the Sandinista Revolution meant that the Sandinista Revolution had to be doing something right, even though I knew they were doing a lot wrong.

What should we have pivoted to after Nicaragua? I can't really say; we were still doing a lot until 87.